

March 5, 2015

Testimony in support of H.B. No. 6932 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING PAID FAMILY MEDICAL LEAVE and H.B. No. 6784 (RAISED) AN ACT EXPANDING PAID SICK LEAVE.

To Senator Gomes, Representative Tercyak and the distinguished members of the committee:

My name is Dr. Helen Evrard. I was a practicing allergy and asthma specialist for 20 years in Pennsylvania and New York State. I am here today to explain why paid sick time is necessary to preserve people's health.

Over the years I treated many patients with limited means, often working for small businesses. When presenting in my office for acute viral illnesses, including influenza, I routinely recommended staying home from work for two main reasons: 1) their recovery would be more rapid with proper rest; and 2) they would not spread the infection to coworkers. Time after time this sound medical advice was ignored because of their inability to lose a day's pay. In those rare cases when my patients took my advice, they would invariably thank me, telling me how much faster their recovery was, and how grateful they were that they didn't "spread the virus" at their workplace.

This approach has solid medical evidence behind it, as well as tons of common sense. When weighing individual or group health concerns against the need to pay for basic resources, the need to pay for basic needs will take precedence every time. My patients did not have full benefits at work, and I knew they would not be able to withstand the financial pressure of few days' unpaid leave. Going back to work when ill affected their own health and recovery, as well as endangering the collective health of their coworkers and – in many cases – the general public. The dangers of working when ill are insidious. When the job involves issues such as driving or operating machinery, the consequences - to both the ill person and an innocent victim - must not be underestimated. In addition, many of these workers served in industries such as restaurants, small retail facilities, or family-owned businesses, each a small hub for propagating disease to the public at large.

I can tell you from my experience that workers get sick no matter the size of their employer, and workers at smaller firms need the same benefit of paid sick time as employees at firms of more than 50. Passing legislation so even small businesses must allow their employees to earn paid sick time will help the individual, and is part of a solid framework for the collective health of neighborhoods, towns, and society as a whole. Thank you.